

# Webster says he'll retire as director of CIA

By Lyle Denniston  
and Mark Matthews

Washington Bureau of The Sun

WASHINGTON — Central Intelligence Agency Director William H. Webster disclosed yesterday that he will retire, giving President Bush a chance to name someone of his own choosing for one of the government's most powerful but least visible jobs.

Mr. Webster, 67, the last major holdover in government from the Reagan administration, has been at the center of recurring rumors for months that he would depart after nearly four years on the job as the nation's top intelligence manager.

The president told reporters at the White House that the CIA chief's retirement decision "was his choice."

The president said, "I haven't considered successors yet," but then he did drop the name of "a worthy man," Robert M. Gates, 47, deputy to the president's national security adviser.

Mr. Gates is known here to be actively interested in the CIA post.

Since Mr. Bush himself was formerly CIA chief, he is aware personally of what the job requires and is likely to make the choice of a new director himself, with little consultation with others, according to a White House staff aide who asked not to be identified.

Others whose names began circulating in speculation on Capitol Hill and elsewhere here were U.S. Ambassador to China James R. Lilley, 63, who at one time was believed to be Mr. Bush's personal preference for the CIA job, and former CIA deputy chief Bobby Ray Inman, 60, who is now a businessman and a university teacher.

Mr. Inman sought immediately to take his name out of the running, saying he would not become director and commenting to a Sun reporter: "I did my tour."

Mr. Lilley served at the CIA when President Bush was the agency's director, from January 1976 to January 1977. Mr. Bush also went on to become ambassador to China.

Mr. Gates, who had served as deputy CIA director under the late William J. Casey and under Mr. Webster, was once nominated for

the top job there by President Ronald Reagan but had his name withdrawn when he became embroiled in the controversy over the Iran-contra scandal.

One well-placed Washington source, who insisted upon anonymity, said that as of two weeks ago, Mr. Bush had only one name on his list of potential CIA directors: Mr. Gates.

Although there have been recurring reports here that White House staff members and State Department officials had been "sniping" at Mr. Webster's leadership of the CIA, and that Mr. Gates himself has been understood to be a Webster critic, the president appeared with Mr. Webster in the White House briefing room yesterday, and the two were openly cordial and flattering to each other.

"We're going to miss you, pal," the president said warmly.

A White House official, who asked not to be identified, said of Mr. Webster's planned departure: "I'm sure he wasn't forced out. It was just time for him to go. You've got to know when to hold 'em, know when to fold 'em."

Mr. Webster himself told reporters that he had finished 20 years in government service and added: "Something tells you that it's a good time to leave."

A source close to Mr. Webster, speaking on condition of anonymity, said Mr. Webster had offered to depart in October 1989 and might have departed last fall, had not the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait occurred.

A congressional source, also refusing to be identified publicly, said there was some lingering doubt about Mr. Gates in the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, but a White House official, declining to be identified, said that officials there were confident that the Senate would now approve Mr. Gates.

Mr. Webster, a former federal appeals court judge from Missouri who is still known to his friends as "Judge Webster," twice took major Washington positions to help restore the tarnished reputations of key agencies.

In February 1978, he left the federal bench to become director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, which had suffered a loss of prestige during the Watergate scandal. Then, four years ago this month, he moved to the CIA to become its director after that agency had been implicated in the Iran-contra scandal.

Yesterday, President Bush praised Mr. Webster pointedly for his "integrity."

The president also lavished praise on the CIA chief for holding that agency to "the single mission of providing intelligence to the policy-makers" and "not trying to shape policy."

Although there was some criticism during the Persian Gulf war of the quality of intelligence delivered to U.S. forces about the Iraqi military, several sources here yesterday said that the criticism was not heavy enough to have cost Mr. Webster his job.

At one time before U.S. troops entered the war, Mr. Webster had drawn some criticism within the Bush administration for appearing to publicly favor continued reliance upon economic sanctions rather than military force. He later switched publicly.

Karen Hosler, Charles Corddry and Richard H. P. Sia of The Sun's Washington Bureau contributed to this article.

## CONTINUED

The Washington Post \_\_\_\_\_  
The New York Times \_\_\_\_\_  
The Washington Times \_\_\_\_\_  
The Wall Street Journal \_\_\_\_\_  
The Christian Science Monitor \_\_\_\_\_  
New York Daily News \_\_\_\_\_  
USA Today \_\_\_\_\_  
The Chicago Tribune \_\_\_\_\_  
**Baltimore Sun p A1**  
Date **9 May 1991**

5



ASSOCIATED PRESS

William H. Webster (left) and President Bush speak to reporters.